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SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR ON GAZA BORDER AND ISRAELI
POLITICS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: In a January 5 meeting with Ambassador Jones, Egyptian Ambassador to Israel Mohamed Asem Ibrahim stressed that Mubarak will sincerely miss Sharon, whom he views as a real partner. Ibrahim expressed concern about the instability of the Israeli party system, suggesting that both Likud and Labor will gain strength at the expense of Kadima. Ibrahim also said that the breach of the Gaza-Egypt border by Palestinian militants on January 4 showed that the PA must take action to avoid further loss of public support in Egypt, to restore order in Gaza, and to avoid closures of Rafah. End summary.

Post-Sharon Era

2. (C) Ibrahim said that the international community "needs to prepare ourselves" for the post-Sharon era. He stressed repeatedly that President Mubarak sees Sharon as a real partner and will mourn the loss. Ibrahim noted that Mubarak had called him twice on the night of Likud's vote on primaries in September to inquire about Sharon's chances, had on several occasions considered not receiving calls or visits from Sharon's political opponents, and had been the first world leader to call following Sharon's mild stroke in December. Ibrahim said he would recommend that Mubarak attend the funeral; if the President could not come, he would recommend that the Prime Minister and at least two other ministers represent Egypt.

3. (C) Stressing Sharon's historical importance, Ibrahim noted that his absence throws the entire Israeli political picture into confusion. He called the end of Sharon's tenure a "test for Israeli society," but added that Israeli democracy had survived even tougher storms. He said that Egypt is concerned about the lack of any real party structures in Israel, "even by Israeli standards." In Ibrahim's analysis, both Netanyahu (Likud) and Peretz (Labor) will gain strength as they woo back erstwhile colleagues who had deserted to join Sharon's Kadima party. Ibrahim urged the international community to avoid taking sides in the upcoming election.

PA must act after Gaza-Egypt Border Attack

4. (C) According to Ibrahim, Egyptian officials had called President Abbas out of a lunch with the Prime Minister of Jordan to demand action following the breach of the Egyptian-Gaza border by Palestinian militants. Ibrahim said the incident on January 4 -- which left three Egyptian Border Guards dead, over 20 wounded, and resulted in the arrest of more than 150 Palestinians by Egyptian forces -- would negatively impact upon Egyptian public support for the Palestinians. He lamented the lack of order in Gaza and what he called the "disastrous" situation in the PA. Amb. Jones replied that the attack once again illustrates the importance of maintaining border security. Ibrahim agreed, saying that if he was in charge he would quickly repatriate the arrested Palestinians and close the Rafah crossing -- or at least limit the numbers and hours of crossings -- as a signal to the PA that they must take action. Ibrahim also expressed hope that the Egyptian casualties would lead Israeli officials to take a more cooperative approach to negotiations on arms for the Border Guards.

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JONES